

[Children](#)

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Children

Raising children is no easy task, and a not-always-dharmic modern world makes it even more difficult.

This month our center section focuses on children and on the samskaras, or rites of passage, that take us from birth through life and beyond. Five questions on nurturing children are answered first in a four-line shloka and then with a longer bhashya, or commentary. These guidelines from Indian tradition are offered not as rigid rules, but as the accumulated wisdom of a thousand generations.

What Is the Fulfillment of a Marriage?

Children are the greatest source of happiness in marriage. Householder life is made rich and complete when sons and daughters are born, at which time the marriage becomes a family and a new generation begins. Aum.

The total fulfillment of the grihastha dharma is children. Marriage remains incomplete until the first child is born or adopted. The birth of the first child cements the family together. At the birth itself, the community of guardian devas of the husband, wife and child are eminently present. Their collective vibration showers blessings upon the home, making of it a full place, a warm place. It is the duty of the husband and wife to become father and mother. This process begins prior to conception with prayer, meditation and a conscious desire to bring a high soul into human birth and continues with providing the best possible conditions for its upbringing. Raising several children rewards the parents and their offspring as well. Large families are more cohesive, more stable, and are encouraged within the limits of the family's ability to care for them. Parents, along with all members of the extended family, are responsible to nurture the future generation through childhood into puberty and adulthood. The Vedas exclaim, "Blessed with sons and daughters, may they enjoy their full extent of life, decked with ornaments of gold." Aum Namah

Sivaya.

What Are the Main Duties of Parents?

The fundamental duty of parents is to provide food, shelter and clothing and to keep their children safe and healthy. The secondary duty is to bestow education, including instruction in morality and religious life. Aum.

Assuring the health and well-being of their offspring is the most essential duty of parents to their children, never to be neglected. Beyond this, parents should provide a good example to their children, being certain that they are taught the Hindu religious heritage and culture along with good values, ethics, strength of character and discipline. Sons and daughters should worship regularly at puja with the parents, and the Hindu sacraments should all be provided. Education in all matters is the duty of the parents, including teaching them frankly about sex, its sacredness and the necessity to remain chaste until marriage. Children must learn to respect and observe civil law and to honor and obey their elders. Parents must love their children dearly, and teach them to love. The best way to teach is by example: by their own life, parents teach their children how to live. The Vedas declare, "Of one heart and mind I make you, devoid of hate. Love one another as a cow loves the calf she has borne. Let the son be courteous to his father, of one mind with his mother. Let the wife speak words that are gentle and sweet to her husband." Aum Namah Sivaya.

How Strictly Must Children Be Guided?

Parents should be most diligent in guiding their children toward virtue, protecting them from all bad company and influences, being strict yet never harsh or mean, allowing them prudent freedom in which to grow. Aum.

Children are constantly learning, and that learning must be guided carefully by the parents. The young's education, recreation and companions must be supervised. They should be taught the scriptures of their lineage. Their religious education is almost always in the hands of the parents. They should be disciplined

to study hard, and challenged to excel and fulfill their natural talents. They should be praised and rewarded for their accomplishments. Children need and seek guidance, and only the parents can truly provide it. In general, it is the mother who provides love and encouragement, while the father corrects and disciplines. A child's faults if not corrected will be carried into adult life. Still, care should be taken to not be overly restrictive either. Children should never be struck, beaten, abused or ruled through a sense of fear. Children, be they young or old, have a karma and a dharma of their own. Their parents have a debt to pay them; and they have a debt to return later in life. The Vedas plead, "O friend of men, protect my children. O adorable one, protect my cattle. O sword of flame, protect my nourishment." Aum Namah Sivaya.

How Do We Overcome Life's Obstacles?

Just as a small leaf can obscure the sun when held before our eyes, so can the past cloud the present and hide our divinity. With Vedic methods, or tantras, we remove impediments to reveal the ever-present inner light. Aum.

An ancient Upanishad defines twenty obstacles, upasarga, to spiritual progress: hunger, thirst, laziness, passion, lust, fear, shame, anxiety, excitement, adversity, sorrow, despair, anger, arrogance, delusion, greed, stinginess, ambitiousness, death and birth. Another obstacle is the intellect which, unguided by intuition, merely juggles memory and reason as a way of life. The experience of these impediments creates reactions that combine with the sum of all past impressions, samskaras, both positive and negative. Residing in the subconscious mind, these are the source of subliminal traits or tendencies, called vasanas, which shape our attitudes and motivations. The troublesome vasanas clouding the mind must be reconciled and released. There are beneficial tantras by which absolution can be attained for unhindered living, including ayurveda, jyotisha, daily sadhana, temple worship, selfless giving, the creative arts and the several yogas. The Vedas explain, "Even as a mirror covered with dust shines brightly when cleaned, so the embodied soul, seeing the truth of atman, realizes oneness, attains the goal of life and becomes free from sorrow." Aum Namah Sivaya.

Should All Youths Be Urged to Marry?

All but the rare few inclined to monastic life should be encouraged to marry and schooled in the skills they will need to fulfill dharma. Young boys destined to be monastics should be raised as their satguru's progeny. Aum.

Traditionally, boys with monastic tendencies are encouraged and provided special training under their satguru's direction. It is considered a great blessing for the family to have a son become a monastic and later a swami. Generally, children should be taught to follow and prepare themselves for the householder path. Most boys will choose married life, and should be schooled in professional, technical skills. Girls are taught the refinements of household culture. Both girls and boys should be trained in the sacred Vedic arts and sciences, including the sixty-four crafts and social skills, called kalas. Boys benefit greatly when taught the profession of their father from a very young age. The mother is the role model for her daughters, whom she raises as the mothers of future families. Sons and daughters who are gay may not benefit from marriage, and should be taught to remain loyal in relationships and be prepared to cope with community challenges. The Vedas pray, "May you, O love divine, flow for the acquisition of food of wisdom and for the prosperity of the enlightened person who praises you; may you grant him excellent progeny." Aum Namah Sivaya.

How Is Family Harmony Maintained?

In the Hindu family, mutual respect, love and understanding are the bedrock of harmony. By not fighting, arguing or criticizing, members cultivate a spiritual environment in which all may progress. Aum Namah Sivaya.

For a harmonious joint family, it is vital to make the home strong, the center of activity and creativity, kept beautiful and clean, a sanctuary for each member. While striving to increase wealth, the wise families live within their means, content with what they have. Activities are planned to bring the family close through shared experiences. A gentle but firm hierarchy of respect for elders is maintained throughout the family. In general, the younger, in humility, defers to the elder, allowing him or her the last word. The elder is equally obliged to not misuse authority. Older children are responsible for the safety and care of their younger brothers and sisters. Disputes among children are settled by their mother, but not kept a secret from the father. Actual discipline in the case of misconduct is carried out by the father. When disputes arise in the extended family, responsibility for restoring harmony falls first to the men. However, any concerned member can take

the lead if necessary. The Vedas say of grihastha life, "I will utter a prayer for such concord among family members as binds together the Gods, among whom is no hatred." Aum Namah Sivaya.